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NARRATIVE OF THE LOSS OF THE CHINESE JUNK "NINGPO" ON D'ENTRECASTEAUX REEFS, NEAR NEW CALEDONIA, WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE REEFS,—*By Lieut. William Chimmo, of H.M.S. "Torch," Ordered to their Rescue in* 1854.

The lorcha *Ningpo*, William Billings, Master, sailed from Hong Kong on the 15th of April, 1854, bound to Port Philip, in ballast; there to be employed as a lighter. She experienced light variable winds until the 21st, when it came on to blow a heavy gale from the N.E.; which continued until the 23rd, the vessel labouring heavily. On the 26th passed between Orange and Monmouth Islands, and found the chronometer had gained 2′ 50″ on its original rate; which was attributed to the violent motion during the gale.

Wood and water getting short, determined on putting into Port Lloyd (Bonin Isles) on the 29th May, in company with the *Exchange*, Chinese coolie ship, with 697 passengers, from Hong Kong to San Francisco.

On making the land found the watch still gaining, its error being 5′ 45″ above the original error. While at this port procured a supply of wood, water, sweet potatoes, and turtle. Here it was the intention of the Master to have beached the vessel to fire and black her bottom; but, owing to the barrier reef and the insufficiency of rise and fall of tide, was prevented.

Sailed from Port Lloyd on the 5th June, with a strong breeze from

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S.W. and heavy rain, which continued until the 20th. The vessel now made much water, and it was at first intended to put into the Isle of Pines, but her course was afterwards altered for Moreton Bay.

On the 22nd July passed close to the westward of Tucopia or Barnett Island: wind strong from S.E. with a high and confused sea,—thick weather following.

On the 28th of July, at noon, strong breezes and cloudy, with a high sea; the N.W. end of Bond Reef, by account, S.b.E., twenty-five miles distant; wind E.S.E.; steering S.S.W., in order to give the N.W. end of the reef a wide berth. At 4h. p.m. ordered a mast-head look-out, but nothing could be seen. As the vessel had been going six knots since noon, the Master felt convinced all dangers had been passed; but, as the chronometer was in error, the same course was steered (S.S.W.) until 8h. p.m., when the vessel was hauled up S.S.E. After the watch had been relieved and the look-out stationed, the Master went below to consult the chart, leaving orders with the chief-officer, whose watch it was, to keep a good look-out for breakers until he came on deck again, and to put the vessel round immediately if he saw anything suspicious,—the vessel now going about five knots.

The Master says:—"He had not been more than ten minutes below when he felt a slight shock. He at once ran on deck, and to his dismay found the *Ningpo* hard and fast on a coral reef. Although going so fast through the water the shock was so trifling that his first impression was that he had run foul of some portion of a wreck, as the day previous a vessel's lower mast was passed."

At the time of her striking no surf or breakers indicated the proximity of danger, and the vessel went on as easily as if she had been run on a shingle beach. This idea was, however, quickly dispelled. On looking over her side the bottom was distinctly visible, with several rocks (?) showing above the water. Having got sail off the vessel (after fruitlessly attempting to back her off), one watch commenced discharging the ballast, while the other got up and bent one of the anchors, which was taken aft and let go to prevent her drifting further on the reef. This was hardly done when the vessel began to make water rapidly; sails, provisions, and everything were got up from below, and in less than fifteen minutes the vessel was half full of water. Daylight appeared and showed the utter hopelessness of their position. The vessel lay with only two feet water alongside at low water, with her stem projecting over a ledge, outside of which was no ground at forty-five fathoms; the vessel's bottom stove in so that the tide flowed in and out.

Two small sand islets were seen about six miles due West, and immediate preparations for landing the provisions and crew were made. At 10h. a.m. of the 29th, the first load was despatched on a raft made of the spare spars, &c. This raft did not reach the islet until next morning, the water being too low on the reef. The remaining portion of the provisions had to be headed up in water casks and towed on shore, as the raft was not able to return to the vessel and the only boat on board was too small to carry a cask. It was not, therefore,

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until the fifth day after the vessel struck that everything was safely landed.

Commenced sinking holes on different parts of the island to obtain water, but without success, salt water always being found at the depth of ten feet. This was a source of great anxiety, as only two casks and a half of water were saved from the wreck, and one of these spoiled by the salt water getting in.

As to provisions there was no immediate apprehension, as the island was covered with various kinds of sea fowl and the reef swarming with a variety of fish, including sharks of an enormous size (having captured one, with a harpoon, sixteen feet in length) and turtle, a few of which were seen and they succeeded in taking one weighing over 600lbs. The difficulty of obtaining water was soon overcome by condensing the salt water from the ship's coppers. A gun barrel was introduced into them, and by the application of cold water outside the condensed water poured through the nipple of the gun into a small water cask. By these ingenious means eighteen gallons of water were obtained in twenty-four hours; much water was saved during some passing showers.

Having brought all the provisions on shore, and being unwilling to trust the boat any more going off to the wreck (as she had been stove in once), knowing that all their hopes depended on her, they commenced fitting her with a canvas deck and wash boards ready for a passage to the Isle of Pines, that being the nearest port where assistance could be procured. This design was, however, frustrated by the men who had volunteered at first to go refusing afterwards, saying they were afraid of the natives of New Caledonia and the adjacent islands, but if the Master would go to the coast of Australia they would proceed with him. This, in a boat thirteen feet long (over all) and very lightly built, was not considered prudent, as the boat could not carry provisions and water for so long a passage. At last, after many days spent in a fruitless endeavour to induce them to abandon this apparently mad scheme, he consented to attempt the passage to Moreton Bay, provided they would wait till the middle of September. This was agreed to and everything was going on smoothly until the 27th of August; when, according to custom, the Master went out at daylight on the North end of the island to look for turtle, remaining until eight o'clock. On his return he was informed that some of the men had taken books, spy-glass, &c., from his tent. "This," to use his own words, "he thought nothing of until he found his charts and *Nautical Almanac* had been taken, when the horrible suspicion flashed across his mind that they contemplated running away with the boat. He at once started to prevent, if possible, such a proceeding; but when he arrived at the beach it proved that his fears were well founded," as the boat had already shoved off and was out of musket range. Heart-sick and in a state bordering on despair, he returned to his tent to see what had been taken and found charts, navigation books, and spy-glass gone, leaving him without any guide to go by in the event of being able to construct a raft.

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The crew now came one by one to excuse themselves for the share they had taken in the affair, offering as an excuse that they feared the boat was intended for the Isle of Pines and they had a dread of the natives there.

The Master now tried to induce the crew to build a raft of the wreck of the *Ningpo*, as he never expected to hear anything more of the boat; but without avail, as they said "they had no tools and that the whalers would be coming about in a short time," and that they would be sure to see the flag-staff that had been erected on the North end of the island. This he considered a very poor chance of getting away, as no sailing vessel would ever come near such a place.

Every preparation was now made for a long sojourn on the island by keeping a vigilant look-out for turtle, which now began to come on shore in great numbers. Two large pens were built, and upwards of eighty, weighing on an average 5cwt., were put into them.

The pens being full they commenced drying the flesh of others to provide against the time they would desert these shores; which they do during the months of November and December, after depositing their eggs, and return as early as July, increasing daily from this period. They were so numerous in September that the Master turned twenty-seven one morning without wetting his feet, and he counted eighteen more asleep in about six inches water, which could have been captured without difficulty. In addition to turtle, quantities of fish of different kinds were caught; all of which were excellent food. These fish were principally of the cod species, but much larger than any before seen. One was harpooned which weighed upwards of 700lbs.; it was black, with large scales of an inch in diameter; the flesh was palatable but tough and full of sinews.

A canoe which had been found in the centre of the island was now fitted with outriggers, sail, &c., and they were thus enabled from time to time to visit the wreck, which had not yet broken up.

They had now been two months and a half on the island and lost all hopes of receiving any assistance from the boat, which every person gave up as lost, when one of the men (Lyttle), who had been always willing to do anything the Master proposed, agreed to venture in the canoe over to an island they had seen to the S.E. This island he afterwards found to be Surprise Island, bearing S.S.E., about thirty miles from the one on which were the crew. Everything was therefore arranged, and on the morning of the 7th of October she started at 4h. a.m., but had to put back, the sea being too rough and the canoe filling. At 6h. 30m. started again, with the intention that if they could discover land to the South of Surprise Island to stand on and endeavour to reach New Caledonia. She arrived at Surprise Island at sunset that evening completely exhausted, having had to paddle all the way against a head sea. Could see nothing like land to the southward, and returned next day to the island.

Another effort was now made to build a boat, but some refused to lend their aid, although saws had been made out of new iron hoop (which on trial worked pretty well) and some cutting tools out of a

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ship's cutlass. They then all volunteered their assistance. Water now ran very short and operations were postponed until a supply should be provided, as the weather threatened rain. Two days afterwards it commenced and continued for seven days, enabling them to fill every available receptacle. During this period the wind, which continued to blow half a gale, raising a high sea, prevented them going to the wreck.

On the 26th they were about to commence their boat when the Master was informed that a vessel was in the offing. At first sight they supposed her to be a whaler trying-out. In order to attract notice large fires were made on each extreme of the island, where quantities of wood had been placed for the occasion, and the ensign was hoisted on the staff union downwards. From the various movements of the vessel they were thrown into great suspense, fearing that the fires had not been seen and that they were doomed to remain on this island without the hope of rescue. However, on her nearer approach, the report of a gun gave them intimation that their signals of distress were observed The vessel advanced towards the island as near as was safe, and sent her boats to their assistance. Their joy may be more easily imagined than described; they had given up every hope. The same evening they were all safely housed on board H.M. steam-vessel *Torch*, commanded by Lieut. William Chimmo, R.N.

WILLIAM BILLINGS,
late Master of *Ningpo*.

Notes by William Tough, Chief Mate, who made a voyage in the Ningpo's boat to the coast of Australia, nearly eight hundred miles.

He says that as soon as the boat and sail were ready Mr. Dainty (a passenger), one seaman, and himself started for the mainland, on the 26th of August. On the 28th they had rain and a strong wind from S.E. On the 6th of October saw land in lat. 26° S. and, being short of water, proposed to land. When near the shore natives were seen, and when the boat was close two of them swam towards her and were taken into her, seeming very friendly. They could speak a little English and told them they could get plenty of water and to come on shore. The natives assisted them to get out of the boat. Afterwards they took everything out of her, and then wanted the crew to take the clothes off their backs, but they would not do so. They then struck them with clubs, and, being so weak, they could not defend themselves. Tough's right arm was broken and his head cut very severely; the passenger and seaman were also wounded and left insensible on the beach. Tough was the first to come to, and he found he was lying with his head and shoulders just out of the water. He found he could not stand and crawled on his hands and knees to some water; he took some also to Mr. Dainty, which revived him a little. The seaman continued insensible until the following morning, when they all started for Moreton Bay.

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For four days they had nothing to eat. They fell in with a native named Moysa, who took them to a hut and gave them some fish. He told them he would take them to Moreton Bay, and early next morning they started. After walking half a mile, Mr. Dainty and the seaman could go no further. They told Tough to proceed and send them back assistance if possible. After walking two days another tribe was met, who said they would see him safe to Moreton Bay. Moysa was then sent back to see what he could do for Mr. Dainty and the seaman. Tough then proceeded with one native for six days; during which time they had to swim several bays and creeks, which was found very painful with a broken arm and the skin burnt off his back by the sun. Two days before reaching Moreton Bay the natives gave him a covering for his back; which was very acceptable, as he had been naked for ten days.

On their arrival at Moreton Bay they were taken to Captain Wickham, the Government Resident, who sent them to the hospital, where they remained a week. Two boats were sent to look for Mr. Dainty and the seaman; the latter only was found, and they were told the other had gone to Wide Bay.

Tough returned to Sydney, when he was sent on board H.M. steam-vessel *Torch*, Lieut. W. Chimmo; which vessel was immediately despatched by the senior naval officer, at the earnest request of the Colonial Government of New South Wales, to rescue the survivors of the *Ningpo;* which she successfully accomplished on the 26th of October, 1854, and carried them all safely to Sydney.

WILLIAM TOUGH, Chief Mate.

A cursory view of D'Entrecasteaux or Bond Reef during the search of H.M. steam-vessel Torch for the survivors of the crew of the Ningpo, by Lieut. Wm. Chimmo.

This dangerous and extensive reef, North of New Caledonia, occupying a space of nearly 1,000 square miles, is an invisible coral reef, with only a few large rocks or stones on its margin; one of these in particular on its N.W. end is nearly twenty feet high. This reef has two openings on its western face, and one (?) on its eastern. The former lead to small sand islets; and from the centre island I think there is a passage through the reef.

The North portion of this reef was seen by Captain Bond, in the *Royal Admiral*, in the first attempt to make the great eastern passage to China, 28th November, 1792. North Huon Island was also seen, and said to be the only one. Earlier in the same year (1792) the South part was discovered by Admiral D'Entrecasteaux, as well as Surprise Island. It is stated, "to be the most dangerous reef he ever saw."

This reef encloses four small islands, of about two or three miles in circumference, viz., North Huon, in lat. 18° 2′ S.; Middle Huon, in 18° 18′ 37″; and South Huon, with Surprise Island on its South extreme; also a few small sand islets and the rocks above-mentioned.

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North Huon Island has a good and safe anchorage from easterly winds; but should be carefully approached, particularly by sailing vessels, having many sunken coral patches two to three miles W.N.W. from it, which is the channel. The landing is good, on a steep sandy beach, having eight feet water over the boat's stern when her bow is on the beach. This island abounds with turtle, fish, and sea birds, but no water.

Middle Huon is safe of approach; but the anchorage is bad, irregular coral bottom, in twelve fathoms, close to the fringe or inner reef which surrounds the island and renders it difficult and dangerous for boats to cross. It is in lat. 18° 18′ 37″, and abounds with turtle, seafowl, fish, and landrail. It was here the crew of the *Ningpo* lived for three months, but they found no water, although wells were dug eighteen to twenty feet deep.

South Huon has also a fringe reef round it, and is still more dangerous of approach for boats than Middle Huon. Being more to the westward it has not the advantage of the shelter of an outer reef. This island is about South four miles from Middle Huon.

Surprise Island, so called by Monsieur D'Entrecasteaux, when he thought he had weathered the North reef of New Caledonia, is S.S.E., twenty-six miles (about) from Middle Huon. The Master of the *Ningpo* landed on this island, and describes it "the same as the other islands." I have not seen it.

The current found on the West face of this reef was generally influenced by the winds, and sets to the N.N.W. The rise and fall of water for five days, hourly observations, gave on an average three and a half to four feet. The current set through the reef and round the extremes of the islands, at the rate of two to three miles per hour.

From the *Ningpo* another wreck could be seen; which shows its fatality to more than one vessel. Her name I could not ascertain, nor is it known whether the crew had landed or perished. They were not, nor had been on any of the islands in this reef.

The Approach to the Islands.—Directions.

It was found that the West face of this reef, instead of being a continuous line North and South, forms two deep bights. The N.W. extreme may be known by several rocks fifteen to twenty feet out of the water,—one, the highest, much resembling a boat's lug sail.

The N.W. extreme forms one arm of a deep bay strewn with patches of coral (awash); in the bight of which lays North Huon Island, of crescent shape, magnetic North and South, and forming, with its sand spits and coral patches, a good anchorage open to the westward on ten points of the compass.

The course for this anchorage is to bring the centre of the island E.S.E., distant five or six miles, and steer for it, keeping (with the sun to the West) a good look-out for the small coral patches awash directly in the entrance and distant from the island two to three miles.

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Gradual soundings, from fifty to ten fathoms, will be carried to the anchorage.

The centre portion of the reef has not so much western extent and forms the South arm of North Huon Bay. It is a detached reef from the main, and is connected with the islands and sand islets.

South Huon Bay is of much greater extent; the depth of which is formed by Middle Huon and South Huon Islands and two sand islets. Here the anchorage is not so safe or good and the ground foul. The islands are entirely surrounded by a fringe reef only passable for boats on their lee or N.W. side at high water, which makes it dangerous to cross, a heavy sea rolling over it. I had not time to examine Middle or South Huon Islands; but the late Master of the *Ningpo* stated it was more dangerous of approach than Middle Huon, but contained more soil and a similar abundance of turtle, birds, and fish.

The S.W. point of this reef, forming the South arm of South Huon Bay, is an abrupt point with deep water close to it. Between Middle and South Huon Islands there is an apparently clear passage as far as the eye can reach to the eastward; but I had not an opportunity of examining it, nor would the unsettled state of the weather allow me to take the *Torch* through on my return.

Admiral D'Entrecasteaux showed great discretion in making the whole outline of the reef unapproachable by a continuous line, as no sailing vessel should attempt to approach it.

Brief Sketch of the Natural History, &c., of North, Middle, and South Huon Islands, by Dr. McDonald, Assistant Surgeon of H.M. steam-vessel Torch.

The basis of these islands appears to consist of a coarse-grained yellowish brown sandstone and superimposed coral beds, on which broken shells, fine sand, and heterogeneous matters continually accumulating have formed the nidus for a scanty vegetation. The great profusion of small masses of pumice stone sufficiently indicates the elevating cause; which, however, must have been very gradual in its operation.

On North Huon Island especially the vegetation is exceedingly poor. The few herbaceous plants to be seen are only such as "love a dry and sandy soil," and the spare foliage of the stunted trees scarcely afford any shelter to the young of the fish-hawk, booby, and noddy, whose rudimentary nests, composed of a few dead leaves matted together, are generally fixed on well selected branches. The masked gannet, scorning even this incipient approach to the exquisitely constructed dwelling of the land birds, brings forth its downy and trembling offspring on the open sand flat, alike exposed to the sweeping storm and the potent rays of a tropical sun. This species was found plentiful on Howe Island as well as Norfolk Island, but specimens are rare in European collections of ornithology.

The fish-hawks, or frigate-birds, and noddies take up their abode a

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little way in the bush, and a handsome cream-coloured gannet, with a bluish beak and red feet perches on the trees near the beach, which is lined by an innumerable host of sea swallows in every stage of growth.

During our stay we had rather extensive practice in turtle turning; these animals coming up in considerable numbers to reconnoitre the ground for depositing their eggs.

Middle Huon Island, on which we found the crew of the *Ningpo*, presents a striking contrast, in the character of its soil and vegetation, to the sterile monotony of the former. The brown mould covering the coral beds is about two feet in depth, and so burrowed and undermined by mutton birds, which do not frequent the northern island, that it is quite impossible to walk through the bush without stumbling continually into these deceptive pit falls.

In addition to the mutton bird, the island is visited by the tropic bird, which forms its nest at the roots of trees in sheltered places. But the most interesting of the feathered tribe is a species of landrail *(rallus)*, which Mr. Billings states occurs also on both South Huon and Surprise Islands. On arriving at New Caledonia we found that the bird was well known there; but how it could have found its way so far to the northward with wings so ill adapted for flight is not so easily accounted for.

The fishes seen were sharks of large size, numbers of the wrasse family, the mackarel family, the eel-like fishes, large sucker fishes, and a great variety of brilliantly tinted species—and in particular the little Emperor of Japan—sporting among irridescent patches of living coral on the reefs.

Of the botanical orders represented in Middle and South Huon Islands the more important are leguminosæ, goodeniaceæ, malvaceæ, capparidaceæ, and compositæ.

Reflections on Sir John Franklin's Expedition, and where his Ships were most probably Beset in the Ice.

The question of the North-West Passage, which has occupied the attention of this country for many years, has at length been set at rest, and its discoverer, Sir Robert M'Clure, has received his just reward. But few victories of any kind are gained without their price, so this contention with thick-ribbed ice in arctic seas has cost us dearly in the loss of Franklin and the gallant band of British seamen by whom he was accompanied. A strange fatality has followed them. With all our efforts we have been unable to succour them in their distress. The different routes which they might have adopted to effect their object,—the ever changing condition of the ice through which they had to penetrate, now arresting their progress and now encouraging it by a tempting lane,—the risks,—the delays,—the acci-

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